

Retiree Activities Office

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RAO Newsletter # 2012-1 - January 6, 2012 - Defense Bill Limits Retiree Health Care Increases

Defense bill limits retiree health care increases

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WASHINGTON – President Barack Obama signed the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act on Dec. 31 which contains a critical initiative to help control spiraling health-care costs within the Defense Department.

Section 701 limits annual TRICARE enrollment fee increases for retirees and their family members to an amount equal to the percentage by which retired pay increases that year.

The act also contains critical initiatives to develop counterterrorism initiatives abroad, build the security capacity of key partners, modernize the force and boost the efficiency and effectiveness of military operations worldwide.

The NDAA also includes:

Section 347 requires DOD to finance an independent assessment of overseas troop basing, advising retention, closure, realignment or establishment of U.S. military facilities outside the United States “in light of potential fiscal constraints on [DOD] and emerging national security requirements in coming years.”

Section 402 reduces authorized Army minimum end strength from 562,000 to 547,000. The other services’ authorized minimum strengths are unchanged, with 325,700 for the Navy, 202,100 for the Marine Corps and 332,800 for the Air Force.

Section 512 of the act creates a new member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which currently includes the Army and Air Force chiefs of staff, the chief of naval operations and the Marine Corps commandant. The new member will be the chief of the National Guard Bureau, who will have responsibility for “addressing matters involving non-federalized National Guard forces in support of home and defense and civil support missions.”

Section 526 extends voluntary separation pay and benefits authority, formerly set to expire Dec. 31, to the end of 2018. Section 530 converts the high-deployment allowance from mandatory to authorized. The allowance currently pays \$100 a day, in addition to all other pay and allowances, to a deployed service member who has been deployed 401 days or more out of the preceding 730 days.

Section 702 sets mental health assessment requirements for service members deployed for contingency operations. The act calls for a series of assessments: one within 120 days before deployment; another during the period between 90 days after a deployment begins and 180 days after it ends; a third within a year after the deployment ends; and a fourth between 18 months and 30 months of redeployment.

The act states assessments are intended to “identify post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal tendencies, and other behavioral health conditions - in order to determine which such members are in need of additional care and treatment for such health conditions.”

Assessments are not required for service members “not subjected or exposed to operational risk factors during deployment in the contingency operation concerned,” the act states.

Section 954 affirms that DOD “has the capability, and upon direction by the president may conduct offensive operations in cyberspace to defend our nation, allies and interests,” subject to the law of armed conflict and the War Powers Resolution. President Barack Obama acknowledges “serious reservations” about parts of the act, particularly provisions that regulate the detention, interrogation, and prosecution of suspected terrorists.

“I have signed the act chiefly because it authorizes funding for the defense of the United States and its interests abroad, crucial services for service members and their families and vital national security programs that must be renewed,” Obama said in a statement released Dec. 31.

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